

CORRESPONDENCE

Proposed universal framework for more user-friendly author instructions

Sylwia Ufnalska

EASE Council member, freelance science translator and editor, Poznań, Poland; sylwia.ufnalska@gmail.com

Alison Terry

Freelance copyeditor, Coimbra, Portugal, editorial@alisonterry.uk

DOI: 10.3897/ese.2020.e53477

According to the Golden rules for scholarly journal editors,¹ published in 2014 by the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), instructions for authors should be simple and easily understood. Unfortunately, it is still surprising how long it can take to find out journals' specific preferences, which can influence acceptance. Journals present this information in very different ways, sometimes across multiple web links, with some details out of date or contradictory.

We propose that journals include a simple table at the start of their instructions for authors, clearly displaying the essential information relating to manuscript preparation and submission. This would make it easy to locate each journal's specific requirements for manuscript structure, content, formatting, etc. Such a table could be also easily updated as journal preferences change, and increase the likelihood of submitted articles meeting the basic requirements (eg word count, number of keywords, format of tables and figures).

The example presented here includes text in the right-hand column to illustrate how the table could be completed, but it can be adapted to suit individual publications. For example, journal editors might indicate "not applicable" for some elements, or add rows with new types of information. Such a "quick check" table is already in use for the EASE journal, *European Science Editing*.²

We hope this initiative will save time for everyone involved in the process of drafting, editing and submitting an article – as well as for the journal's editorial team, since manuscripts will then be more likely to meet submission criteria; so please help us spread the word!

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to EASE members who provided useful comments on the draft of the table: Eva Baranyiová, Ksenija Baždarić, Paola de Castro, Yateendra Joshi, Joan Marsh, Bahar Mehmani, Duncan Nicholas, Pentti Nieminen, Mandy Payne, Arjan Polderman, Pippa Smart, and Jadranka Stojanovski.

References

- 1 Ufnalska SB, Polderman AKS. Golden rules for scholarly journal editors. *European Science Editing* 2014;40(3):65. <https://ease.org.uk/publications/ease-toolkit-journal-editors/golden-rules-scholarly-journal-editors>
- 2 Quick check for submissions. *European Science Editing*. <https://ese.arphahub.com/about#Quickcheckforsubmissions> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 3 EASE Guidelines for Authors and Translators of Scientific Articles to be Published in English. European Association of Science Editors. <https://ease.org.uk/publications/author-guidelines-authors-and-translators/> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 4 ORCID. <https://orcid.org/> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 5 Research Organization Registry <https://ror.community/> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 6 Funder Registry. Crossref. <https://www.crossref.org/services/funder-registry/> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 7 CRediT – Contributor Roles Taxonomy. CASRAI. <https://www.casrai.org/credit.html> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 8 EASE Ethics Checklist for Authors. European Association of Science Editors. <https://ease.org.uk/publications/ease-checklist/> (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 9 EASE Form for Authors' Contributions and Conflict of Interest Disclosure. European Association of Science Editors. https://www.ease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ease_form_0.pdf (accessed 21 April 2020)
- 10 Conflicts of Interest. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. <http://www.icmje.org/conflicts-of-interest/> (accessed 21 April 2020)

BASIC INFORMATION FOR MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION

GENERAL GUIDELINES	Manuscripts should be COMPLETE, CONCISE and CLEAR (see EASE Guidelines for Authors and Translators ³ , available in many languages). Follow the appropriate reporting guideline, if applicable
WORD LIMITS	
Body text	≤ X words (justified exceptions allowed)
Abstract	≤ X words; structured for original research (BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES, METHODS, RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS), unstructured for review articles
Keywords	≤ X terms, listed alphabetically, singular, separated with semicolons; lowercase except proper names; avoid abbreviations
Highlights (below the abstract)	X-Y bullet points (≤ X words each, describing the study in lay terms)
Tables/figures	≤ X tables/figures in total. Their description (captions, values, units, etc.) should be consistent and informative, with all abbreviations explained
TITLE PAGE INFORMATION (elements to include, format required)	
Title	≤ X characters, with a description of the study type, if relevant (eg a review)
Short running title	≤ X characters
Author names	Full name: given name(s) first, family name last
Affiliation info required	Department, institution, city, country, email (indicated with superscript a, b, c; each on a new line)
Corresponding author contact details	Indicate with an asterisk, supply tel. #
Persistent identifiers of author(s), etc.	ORCID iD (s) ⁴ , identifiers of research organization (s) ⁵ , funder (s) ⁶ and research project(s), if applicable
STRUCTURE OF BODY TEXT, END MATTER, REFERENCES	
Typical/mandatory headings	Introduction (background and objectives), Methods, Results, Discussion (with a concluding paragraph)
Subheadings	≤ X levels of subheadings, not numbered
Specific wording required for any section	Methods section must include usual ethical approval for human and animal studies (Helsinki/Institutional Review Board compliance, informed consent) and subsection “Statistical analysis”, identifying the variables and methods used
End matter (e.g. authorship contributions, conflict of interest)	Identify authors by initials in the authorship contributions section (consider using CRediT ⁷)
References: maximum number?	Not limited (with DOIs, URN, PURL, etc. if applicable)
Referencing style	X style; for more details and examples, see <URL>. Endnote style can be downloaded here <URL>. Make sure that each citation is complete and accurate

FORMATTING (links to any style guides/templates and samples: fonts, margins, tables, figures)	
Spelling	UK or US, if consistent
General style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numbers ≥ 2 as numerals (for exceptions, see EASE Guidelines³) Statistics: $p \leq 0.001$, $n = ##$ (95% CI ##, ##)
SUBMISSION NOTES	
Cover letter required? Specific content?	Not required but text field in the online submission system allows for comments to the editorial office
Links to all required author forms: needed at submission or after acceptance? Signed by all authors or by submitting author?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EASE Ethics Checklist⁸ signed by corresponding author at submission EASE Form⁹ or ICMJE COI forms¹⁰ signed by all authors at submission
Proposed reviewers: optional/mandatory? How many? What details are required?	OPTIONAL: suggest/oppose up to 3 potential reviewers (full name, email, institution). Consider diverse peer reviewers in terms of gender, ethnicity and geographical distribution
Tables: separate files?	Include at the end of the manuscript (separate pages)
Figures: embedded in the manuscript or supplied separately as high-resolution image files? What formats are preferred?	For initial submission, figures can be embedded in the manuscript. If it is accepted, high-resolution files (EPS/TIFF/RAW) will be required
Supplementary files?	Upload any supporting data or other required files (eg ethics approval) for review
Fees for open access, colour, etc.?	Publication fee X. Colour free online but X per figure for print
JOURNAL POLICIES, ETC.	
Publication model*	Open access, licence X; fee structure: <URL>
Preprint policy	Publication on any preprint server is acceptable
Data sharing	Recommended repositories: ... Clinical trials must include a data sharing statement; other studies may also do so
Peer review**	Time to first decision about whether to send for peer review: about X days. External, double-blind review usually by X reviewers, taking about X days/weeks. Editor(s) make(s) the final decision
Manuscript acceptance rate	About X%

* Publication models: subscription, hybrid (open access optional for a fee) or open access

** Peer review systems – e.g. open, single-blind, double-blind, triple-bind